

Education remains one of my highest priorities, and it's keeping me busy. Our schools face underfunded federal mandates, our students face ever-increasing costs of a college education and our country's competitive edge continues to be in danger.

College costs have grown nearly 40 percent in the last five years. Students are graduating from college with more debt than ever before and many would-be students are holding off on going to college or skipping it completely.

Just this July, Congress passed the "College Cost Reduction Act" ([H.R. 2669](#)) providing much needed relief to college students and their families. Highlights of the bill include cutting the interest on need-based student loans in half from 6.8 percent to 3.4 percent, raising the maximum amount available for Pell Grants by \$500 and providing incentives to highly qualified teachers to work in high-need, low-performing schools.

The Head Start program is also a priority. Many families in the Central Coast and throughout the country are familiar with this program, which has been shown to have longterm benefits to children who begin their education before kindergarten. Earlier this year, the Congress reauthorized the Head Start program for an additional four years.

The most important federal law addressing public education is the "Elementary and Secondary Education Act," commonly known in its current form as "No Child Left Behind." While I continue to applaud the goals outlined in the bill, I am more certain than ever that it contains fundamental flaws that must be addressed this year during its reauthorization.

Accountability remains important and we must continue to demand that our public schools are meeting the needs of all our students. In asking this of our schools and our teachers, we must ensure that Congress lives up to its end of the bargain. Already this year the House of Representatives has increased funding to close the gap between the president's past promises and the needs of our schools by increasing money to NCLB, teacher training and educating children with disabilities.

I look forward to leading Congress in a direction that benefits students in our communities and around the country.

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